

LIGHT UP A LIFE

A Handbook For Volunteers



Older Americans Act

**Eldercare
Volunteer Corps**

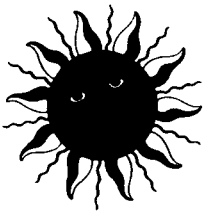
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"You can pay someone to do something for you, but when someone volunteers, you know they really care."

-- A homebound elder

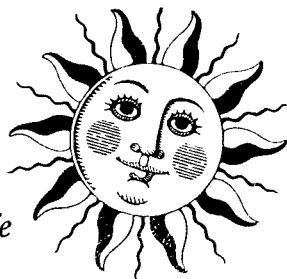
WELCOME!

The fact that you are reading these words shows that you have concern for people who cannot help themselves. Whether you have been volunteering for years or whether you are just beginning, the State of Tennessee would like to make you an honorary member of the **TENNESSEE ELDERCARE VOLUNTEER CORPS!**

The only dues are a concern for others and a willingness to help. The rewards are great. The volunteer corps is people helping people and organizations networking to support, train, and recognize volunteer efforts.

So, welcome to the **TENNESSEE ELDERCARE VOLUNTEER CORPS!**

What's In It For You.



"The elderly people I've met through our volunteer program have taught me so much about life and how to meet its difficulties. They've also taught me the importance of taking time to smell the flowers."

As a member of the Tennessee Eldercare Volunteer Corps, you can expect:

A mutually agreed upon "job" description of what you are planning to do.

An explanation of how your efforts fit into the overall program.

A beginning and an ending time frame of commitment for your service -- after which you may discuss re-enlisting or changing projects.

Identification of a person to whom to report and from whom you will receive help when needed.

Periodic review of your volunteer efforts and programs.

Helpful training and networking sessions, and recognition of your efforts and services as a volunteer.

How Can You Help?

By sharing your time and friendship:

Read aloud

Talk about news of the day

Write letters or encourage your friend to do so

Help revive old interests and talents or develop new ones

Bring magazines or books

Learn about friends and relatives, where they are, and how they relate to your friend. You may be able to restore old contacts.

Assist in creating new friendships.

Or, you may want to offer a particular service, such as:

Deliver groceries

Take out trash

Help with yard work

Bring in the mail

Perform minor home repairs

Help with paper work

Provide transportation to doctor, church, or shopping

Share a hobby or skill, such as growing house plants, quilting or crafts

Deliver meals or medicine

You have a lot to offer. Choose an activity you will enjoy and remember to be realistic about your time before you sign your volunteer agreement.

What's Expected of You?

VOLUNTEER'S CODE OF CONDUCT

Be caring. Be punctual.

Honor your commitment. Be pleasant.

Take part in training sessions.

Don't discuss your personal problems or religious/political beliefs with the person you are helping.

Don't gossip about him/her to your family or others.

Do report problems to your supervisor.

Don't solicit money, gifts, or tips.

Don't bring your friends or relatives into the home of the person you are helping without prior permission.

Never use alcohol or illegal drugs in the person's home or prior to service, and don't smoke in the home.

Don't use the person's car and don't use his/her telephone for personal calls.

"Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody."

Robert Fulghum, "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarden"

What To Do If . . .

You may encounter some of the following situations as you work with the elderly. If you are not sure how to handle these situations, or if you come across other situations of which you are unsure, talk with your volunteer coordinator about them.

Some possibly difficult situations which may arise:

The person you are visiting asks you to:

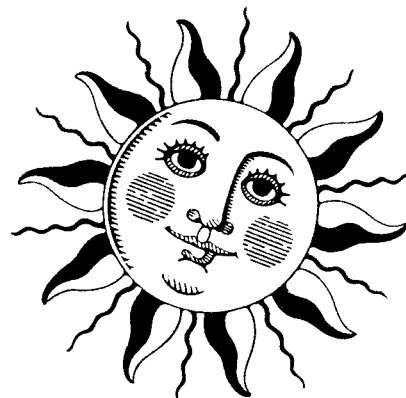
come more often or stay longer than you are able to do,

give him/her something to eat or drink that you have been told will cause an adverse reaction,

pay an overdue bill with your own money or that of your agency,

get involved in a family argument, or

ask for advice on business or medical matters.



Visiting

Before you visit:

Call ahead or check in some way to be sure you are welcome. Set up a time for the visit and be punctual.

Try to be consistent in spacing your visits. Anticipation of your visit is sometimes half the pleasure, so a regular weekly visit can mean more than longer irregular visits.

Start with short visits of about twenty minutes and lengthen the visits as your relationship develops.

Learn something about the person you will visit so you can discuss their interests.

While visiting:

Make sure the elderly person knows who you are and what program you represent.

Sit so that you may be easily seen and heard.

Be respectful and sensitive to the mood and needs of the person. Be helpful, but don't do things the person can do for him/herself. Don't make promises you can't keep.

Accept graciously small refreshments or inexpensive tokens of appreciation if they are offered. This allows the person to feel like a good host, and it prepares the way for his/her accepting favors you may want to do later. However, don't ask for things. Also, only take small gifts to the person on special occasions.

Be willing to talk over problems and consider alternatives in resolving them.

Share information concerning other programs which may be of help.

Talking with someone who has impaired hearing:

Sit on the elderly person's best hearing side. Make eye contact or touch his/her hand first to indicate you plan to speak. Face the person in case he/she relies on lip reading. Use facial expressions and hand movements to convey meaning.

Speak clearly, in phrases, using a moderate rate of speed in a low pitched voice and a consistent voice volume. Do not shout.

Watch the listener's face and repeat words that are not understood. Rephrase if needed. Offer to check the on/off switch and batteries on a hearing aid, if needed.

Talking with someone who has impaired vision:

People with impaired vision are usually able to sense in a variety of other ways; don't assume they are deaf or mentally limited. Most have had good vision for most of their lives; they enjoy remembering things they have seen. Describe things to them. Allow them to hold or touch objects. Don't be surprised if they want to touch your face or hands; the sense of touch is important.

Visiting with someone who has suffered a stroke:

Sit on the person's "good side;" there may have been vision or hearing damage to one side only. Don't assume the person cannot understand just because he/she cannot respond.

Don't be patronizing or treat the person as if he/she is senile. It can be very distressing to be treated as senile when only physical and communication functions have been impaired.

Encourage the person to demonstrate the exercises that have been recommended. If the stroke has affected the person's speech, encourage him/her to talk with you. Be patient.

Life Review

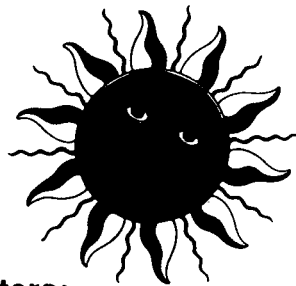
And, most of all be a good listener --
listen with your heart.

*"When an old person dies, it is like
a library burning."*

-- Alex Haley

It is good therapy for all of us to review our lives. This is especially true of our older friends, who can derive much pleasure from recalling earlier days when they were more active.

Listening to reminiscences can be both an entertaining and a learning experience for the listener, and it can be a bonding experience between the listener and the one recalling the experiences.



Conversation Starters:

Where were you born? Were your parents born there? What can you remember about your grandparents? Where were they born? What did they do?

Tell me about your mother? Was she a good cook? What was one of her best dishes? What type of work did your father do? What did he like to do best?

What do you remember about the town where you grew up? What do you remember about your school, your favorite teachers, and the subjects you liked best?

How did you spend your summers? Did you have any hobbies, favorite songs, or sports? What were some of the customs? How did they differ for boys and girls?

When did you first move from home? Where did you move? What effect did the move have on you? What kind of work did you do? What wages were you paid? What did you buy with your first check?

What have been your favorite activities as an adult (hobbies, recreation, etc.)? What are your favorite radio/television programs and movies?

What do you remember about World Wars I and II, the 1920's, the 1930's, prohibition, the depression, and the McCarthy hearings?

What are your feelings regarding money, women's liberation, health, sex, humor, the family, or today's youth?

Who was the first president for whom you voted? Who was your favorite president? Why? Who are the men and women you admire most?

What have been some of the most significant changes you have seen during your lifetime? Is there any single life event that stands out as most important? If you could relive any day in your life, what would it be?

What message would you like to pass on to your children? To the world?

Your Relationship with the Primary Caregiver

You may be providing services for an older person --

 who lives with grown children or a more able spouse, or

 who has children, relatives, or friends nearby who provide most of the care and support for your new friend.

Your role as a volunteer for a specific service is very important to the person(s) who have the overall responsibility for care.

It is important that you understand the situation of the primary caregiver(s). They possibly could do the work you are providing. They may have been doing it for years already.

Your presence may mean that they will have a few hours free from worry about their aging relative -- hours in which they can do their own chores or in which they can take part in some activities which will enable them to come back to their responsibilities with renewed energy and devotion.

Your work can help them to do a better job in the long run.

Providing Information to the Primary Caregiver

Providing information about other available services may be especially helpful to the primary caregiver or older person.

Familiarize yourself with the agencies in your community which offer the following services and watch for opportunities to refer people to them.

Homemaking services offer help with shopping, cooking, and chores.

Home health services offer help with nursing, medication, and bathing needs.

Some grocery stores will deliver orders within the community.

Meals on Wheels can deliver one or two hot meals a day.

Certain churches and senior centers serve meals at their buildings. These can offer opportunities for socializing, as well as eating.

Telephone reassurance programs can provide a daily phone visit and can check on the well-being of the elderly person.

Transportation services can help with appointments and shopping.

If you are a volunteer with a social service agency, your volunteer coordinator should be able to tell you which of the above services are available in your community. You may also want to visit your local library and ask the reference librarian or librarian in charge for published directories of community services.

Further Reading

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Another publication through this project is Coordinating Volunteer Services to the Elderly, which includes a directory of volunteer resources.

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